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SUBJECT: Somalia - Request for Government Outreach Voluntary Visitor Program

REF: 07 STATE 116686

Unclassified - entire text

¶1. Project Description: Somalia Unit, based at Embassy Nairobi, requests the creation of a Voluntary Visitor (VOLVIS) program that will enable a team of four people from Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG) to study options for enhancing their outreach efforts on behalf of the TFG. We request a four or five working day program.

¶2. Post Objective: This VOLVIS program seeks to encourage the TFG to more efficiently and effectively conduct their outreach activities, thereby 'winning the hearts and minds' of the Somali people, which is a vital element in the success of the TFG. Currently, the TFG is not capitalizing on opportunities to reach out to their constituents - the Somali people - in a systematic manner, with frequent and targeted media appearances. The objective of this program would be to expose the TFG officials to media and public affairs professionals who would guide the TFG officials in recognizing opportunities for and situations that require outreach, and then educating them in the most effective means of accomplishing that outreach. At the same time, the Minister of Information will be exposed to a variety of U.S. policymakers, practitioners, and experts, which should positively affect his view of the United States and the U.S. government's efforts to improve Somalia.

¶3. Background: The current administration of the TFG came to power almost exactly one year ago. The transitional period in which to organize elections was extended for two years, from October 2009 to October 2011. The Sharif administration had gained significant positive momentum until, in early May 2009, the extremist group al-Shabaab began a sustained offensive aimed at toppling the TFG. The offensive continues to this day, and has required the TFG to focus almost exclusively on security, rather than the transitional tasks.

¶4. The current Minister of Information, who was appointed in August 2009, ran a media outlet before his appointment and has proven to be very motivated and resourceful. His most notable success has been the late 2009 revitalization of the TFG radio station, Radio Mogadishu. The station had been limping along for many years with a skeleton staff operating outdated and inadequate equipment. The Minister independently secured a new FM transmitter from private donors, which instantly boosted the broadcast reach of Radio Mogadishu to 100 kilometers outside of Mogadishu. The station is roundly cited as one of the most successful operations being overseen by the TFG. The Minister has also overseen the

development of a new website, and a well-coordinated effort among the international community to provide much-needed assistance to his ministry.

¶5. The Somalia Unit supports the addition of the Minister of Justice, a Member of Parliament, and the Information Minister's Senior Advisor to this program. All three additional members are vital parts of the TFG's ability to reach out to the Somali people, countering the extremist messaging propagated by al-Shabaab. The addition of a Member of Parliament will allow a member of the legislative branch to absorb information about messaging along with his colleagues from the executive branch of the TFG.

¶6. Post Recommendations: Post recommends the following three themes for the program:

a. Understanding the importance of proactive and systematic outreach - How does a government coordinate itself to administer an effective outreach operation? How does a government decide which events merit an aggressive outreach campaign or response? When should a government refrain from engaging in a 'war of words' with groups who are not governed by norms of media work?

b. Developing appropriate messaging in order to achieve policy goals - How should a government shape messages in a situation in an often-hostile physical environment? How does a government counter messages from a well-funded extremist group that is not bound by

rules of factuality and decency? What tools are the most appropriate for various situations?

c. Understanding U.S. policy goals in Somalia - What are the United States government's primary goals in Somalia? How do the U.S. government's goals complement the goals that Somalis hold for themselves? What is the U.S. government doing to affect positive change in Somalia? In contrast to the extremist propaganda, what is the reality of U.S. engagement with Somalia?

¶7. Post recommends the team meet their respective counterparts at the following U.S. institutions (if possible):

- * Foreign Press Center.
- * One or more studios of major media outlets.
- * Think tanks.

The team would like to understand the processes and tools used in mounting effective media campaigns, whether short or long term.

¶8. Timing: Somalia Unit requests that this program take place as soon as possible. The Minister of Information, the leader of this delegation, is planning a wide-ranging trip to visit the United Kingdom and Canada, in addition to the United States. We are coordinating with our Nairobi-based British and Canadian counterparts to ensure this trip has maximum effectiveness and efficiency. As such, we are requesting that this program be conducted in late February or early March, depending on when the Minister receives his U.S. visa and begins his travel. The Minister is slated to be back in Africa for a meeting starting on or about March 5.

¶9. Nominees: The group will be composed of four TFG representatives with different areas of oversight and responsibility for outreach on behalf of the TFG. Full bio data are available for the nominees

in the EVDB under project number E/VFE-2010-0178.

¶10. Support: The TFG will pay for the international airfare for the group. Somalia Unit asks that ECA/PE/V/F/E contribute per diem, housing, and internal transportation for the group during the proposed program.

¶11. Points of Contact: PAO for Somalia Mark. V Zimmer, ZimmerMV@state.gov, 254-20-363-6181, fax 254-20-363-6329. Alternate POC: Public Affairs Assistant Ali Issack, IssackAA@state.gov; 254-20-363-6198.
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